

In Service to Montana...

Big Sky. Big Land. Big History.
Montana
Historical Society

Presentation by Kirby Lambert of the Montana Historical Society
March 1, 2013 for the ServeMontana Symposium
MontanaHistoricalSociety.org

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Red cross vehicle, eastern Montana, ca. 1920

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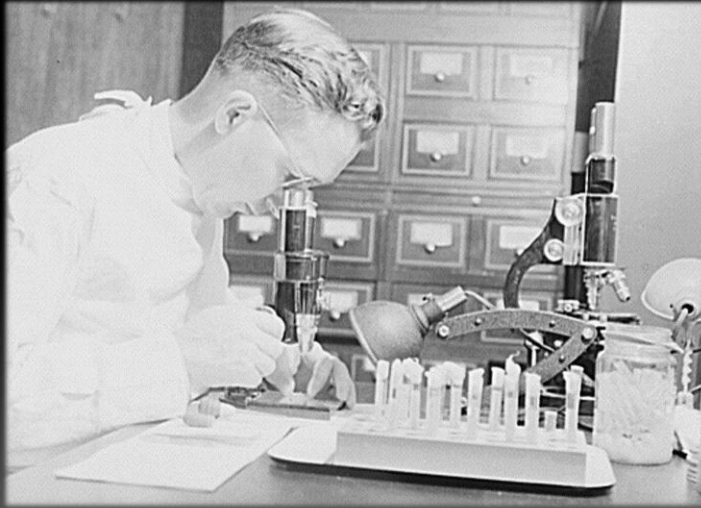
Congratulations on your 20th anniversary. In honor of this important milestone I've been asked to address the role that 'service' has played in Montana history. As you know, the term "service" represents a very broad category, and because our time is limited, I'll only be giving you the briefest overview, having to omit more of the story than I'll be able to include. Hopefully, though, I will leave you with a better appreciation of the extent to which service by individuals, in many different forms, has impacted the Treasure State's history.



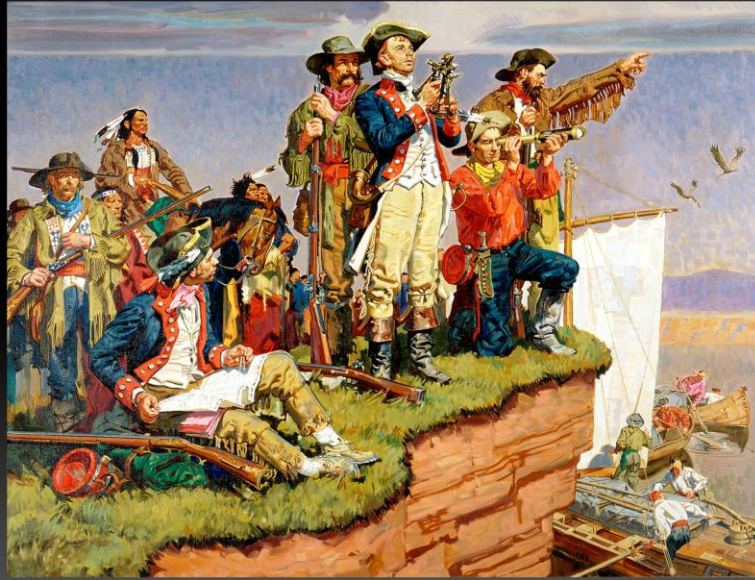
Local 975 painting the bleachers at the baseball park as a community service project, Kalispell, 1958

I'm defining service broadly, exploring both the big and little ways that individuals have worked to improve life under the Big Sky. As Sally Koch observed, "Great opportunities to help others seldom come, but small ones surround us every day."

A Bacteriologist at the Health Service's Rocky Mountain Laboratory,
Hamilton, 1942



Throughout our past, service has been performed by both volunteers and professionals, but even for those who were paid the money wasn't the only, or even primary, motivator. Rather, they pursued these endeavors through a desire to help their fellow citizens.



The Lewis and Clark Expedition by Dean Cornwell

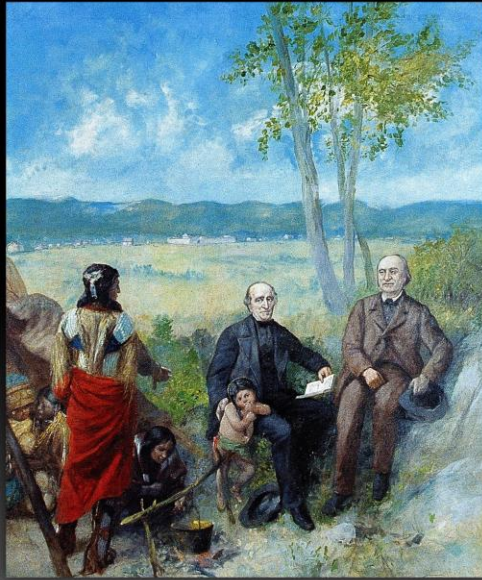
Long before Thomas Jefferson purchased Louisiana Territory, Montana was home to diverse groups of Native Americans—Northern Plains and Plateau tribes, each with their own distinct histories and cultures. Although Lewis and Clark were not the first non-Indians to visit this region, they are certainly the best known of Montana's early explorers and they were the first to come here in service to the U. S. Government.



After the White Man's Book by
E. S. Paxson, Montana State Capitol

While Lewis and Clark were only passing through others would soon follow with a very different mission. Among the first non-Indians who came to the Treasure State to stay were men and women of the cloth. Having heard stories about the Black Robes from the Iroquois who came to Montana as employees of the fur trade, in the 1830s the Salish sent four delegations to St. Louis hoping to bring priests back to Montana. The first two delegations were met with rejection and all members of the third expedition were killed en route. The fourth delegation, however, was successful and in 1841 Father Pierre Jean de Smet arrived in the Bitterroot Valley where he established St. Mary's Mission near present-day Stevensville.

Fathers Ravalli (right)
and De Smet (right) as
depicted by F.
Pedretti's Sons,
Montana State Capitol



Father De Smet was followed by other priests as well as missionaries representing other denominations. One of the most beloved of these men was Fr. Anthony Ravalli who arrived at St. Mary's Mission in 1845, where he developed an agricultural program and built Montana's first grist mill and sawmill. Father Ravalli even learned the language so he could better minister to the Salish people and he was highly regarded as a physician and a pharmacist.



The first nuns who came to Montana were four Sisters of Providence, including Mother Mary of the Infant Jesus seen here, who came at the request of Father De Smet to establish a girl's boarding-school at St. Ignatius. In 1864 the four Canadian sisters traveled from Montreal to Vancouver by way of Panama, a journey that took six weeks. After stocking up on supplies in Vancouver, they embarked upon the second six-week leg of their trek, this time on horseback. In spite of the many difficulties inherent in such travel, the dedicated nuns quote "bore all manner of discomfort, not only bravely and without complaint, but with a buoyant and sparkling cheerfulness."

Students at Fort Shaw Indian School, 1890s



Continuing to quote, upon their arrival at St. Ignatius the four sisters “began at once the education of the Indian girls, and thus was opened . . . the first Indian boarding-school in the Northwest. The following years were years of hardship and privation, but the mission on which the Sisters were sent was fulfilled. They toiled early and late for these children . . . and tending the sick Indians was ... one of the Sisters’ favorite employments.” Many boarding schools followed this first one, and while the experience would prove to be harrowing for most Indian students and their families, and detrimental to traditional Indian cultures, it’s important to remember that however you view the ultimate consequences, these early nuns and priests were sincere in their desire to serve.

First Montana Volunteers en route home from the Philippines
San Francisco, 1899



Throughout Montana history, one of the most significant forms of service has been military service. This was true for Montana's Indian peoples before the arrival of Euro-Americans and it has remained true as long as Montana has been a state. At the onset of the Spanish-American War in 1898, President McKinley issued an appeal for volunteers. Montana's allotment called for the enlistment of five hundred soldiers. 1,000 men responded immediately. As one officer observed, "These men came from the hills and plains, the mines and ranches of a progressive state and were typical of its aspirations and hopes. Loyal, brave and obedient, they stamped their impress upon this community in limitless esteem." At least in part, Montana's enthusiastic response to the call for volunteers relates to the fact that this was the first time that the young state was able to participate in an event of such national importance as a full-fledged member of the Union. But it wouldn't be the last.

Glasgow Native William Belzer, 135th Air Squadron, France, WWI



In World War I, Montana contributed a higher percentage of soldiers, money, and resources than any other state. Nearly 40,000 men—ten percent of the state's population—went to war.

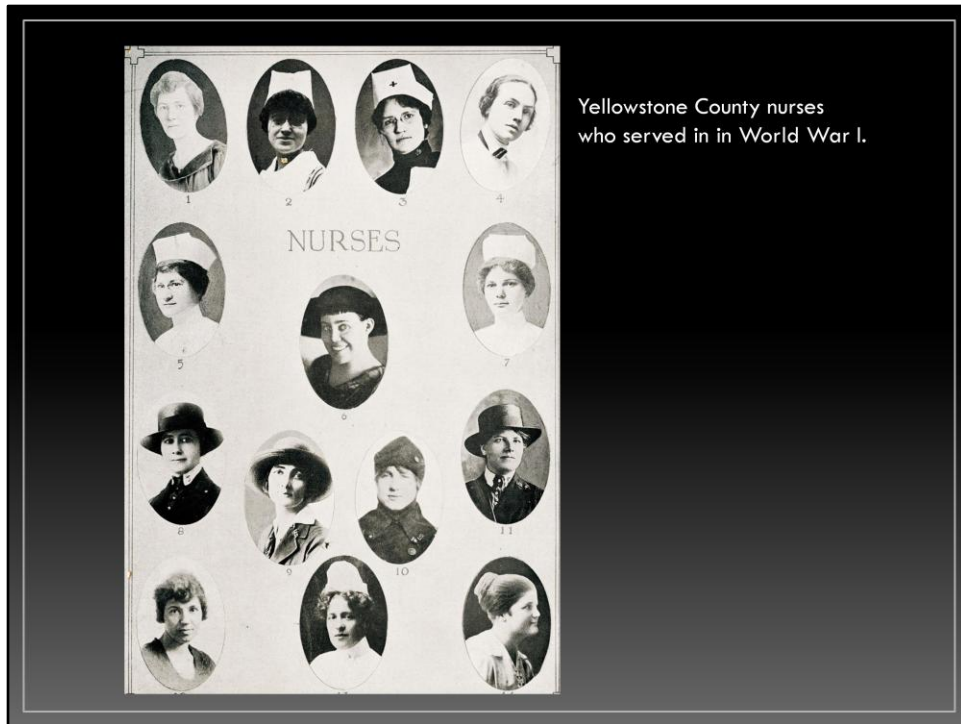


Also during World War I, American Indians, from Montana and elsewhere, volunteered at rates higher than the national average, and they did so in spite of the fact that many of them were not U.S. citizens. In large part, this is due to the traditional role of warfare in Plains Indian Culture. For example, Chief Plenty Coups encouraged young Crow men to enlist, stating "This is your chance to prove that you are warriors, just as your fathers and grandfathers were in the old days. But this is a new day with new ways of counting coup and proving your manhood. You are Americans—the first Americans. Be proud of that."

"Montana Day" among the 163rd Regiment in
the South Pacific, March 4, 1945



Again in World War II Montana sent a greater percentage of its population than almost any other state. 1,500 members of the Montana National Guard became part of the 163rd shown here. Stationed in New Guinea and other remote islands in the South Pacific, these men served some of the toughest duty in the war. Altogether, on all fronts, more than 1,500 Montanans died in battles far removed the mountains and plains of the Treasure State.



And it wasn't just the men who went to war; Montana nurses were among the 10,000 women who served overseas during World War I. In fact, the first military nurses arrived in Europe before the American Expeditionary Forces did.

An unidentified woman in her "Victory Garden," World War I

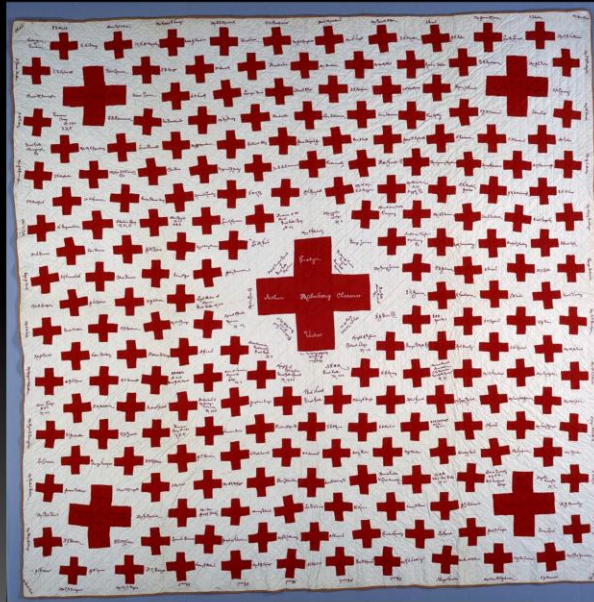


Although those serving overseas certainly made the biggest sacrifices, the war effort was all-encompassing, and Montanans of every ilk did their part to keep the home fires burning. Miners in Butte worked extra shifts to increase production, and loggers quickened their pace to supply lumber for ships, airplane hangars, and military construction. In both World Wars, women raised Victory Gardens and canned home-grown produce so that commercially produced food could be used to feed soldiers and the Allies.



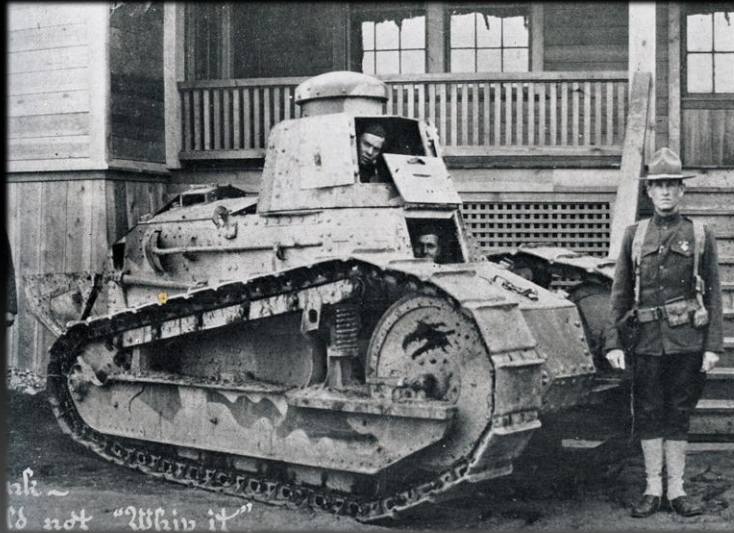
Children were eager participants in scrap drives that encouraged citizens to turn in unneeded household items for re-use by the military. In addition to metal drives like the one shown here, the government called on Americans to donate old tires, garden hoses, and even rubber boots to be recycled into tires for military jeeps and airplanes.

Signature quilt created
as a fundraiser for the
Red Cross by the
Ladies Auxiliary of the
Order of the United
Commercial Traveler,
Cascade County, 1918

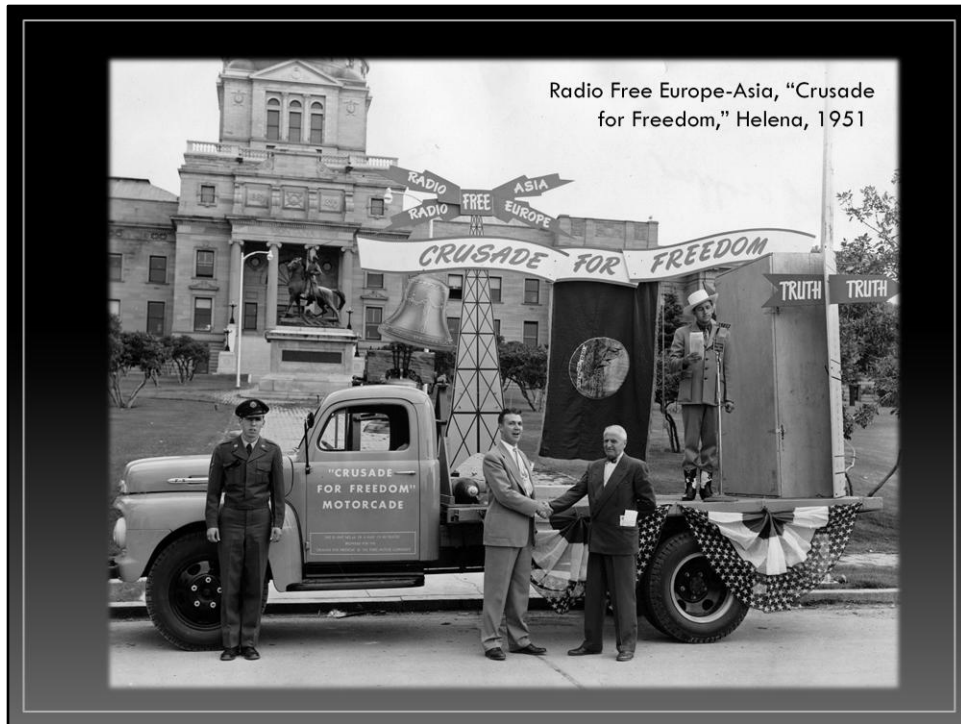


Many Montanans also served the war effort by contributing money or working on fundraisers. This Red Cross signature quilt is one such example. Citizens of Great Falls bought squares so that their names could be embroidered on the quilt, and when it was completed, the quilt was then raffled off to raise additional funds.

Victory Liberty Drive, Butte, World War I

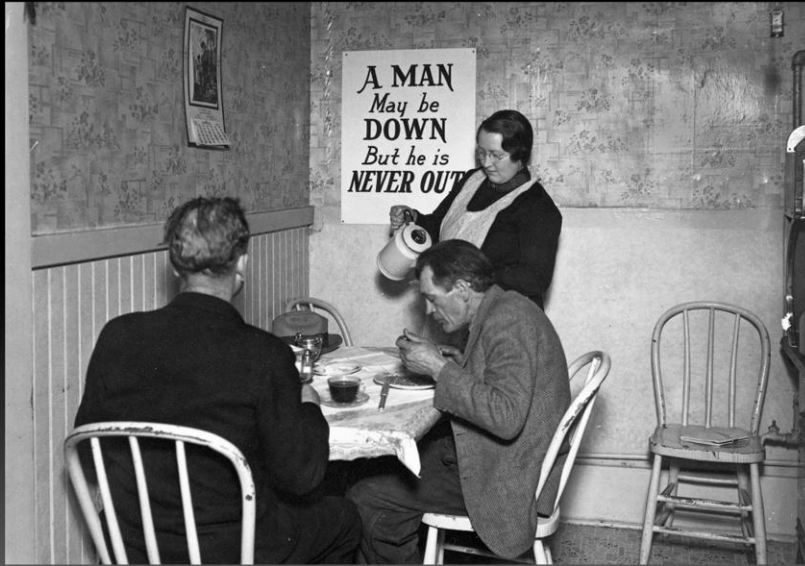


Throughout the course of the war communities all over the state also sponsored Liberty Loan drives. Montanans not only responded, they responded generously. For example, Montana's allotment for the first Liberty Loan Drive in World War I was a little over six and a half million dollars, but citizens of the Treasure State responded by raising almost sixteen million. While Butte's allotment for this drive was 1.8 million, Silver Bow County alone raised almost 8 million, half of the state's total.



Following World War II, the U.S. entered the Cold War, an entirely different kind of war in which we competed with the Soviet Union for technological, economic, and military supremacy. Americans devoted tremendous amounts of time and money in an effort to fight communism at home and abroad, and through programs like radio free Europe, to promote democratic values and institutions in countries where the tenants of capitalism were not embraced.

Salvation Army, Butte, ca. 1935

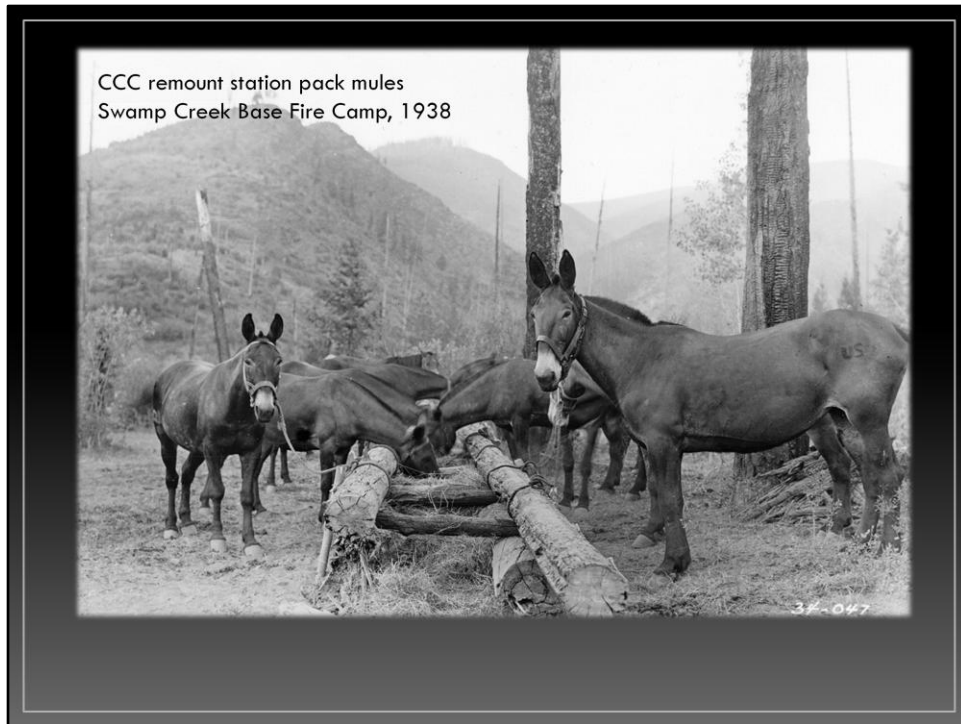


Of course not all wars involve guns and foreign enemies. Poverty has always plagued humankind, and for Montana and the rest of the country this was never more true than it was during the Great Depression. Because the impact of the economy's crash was so far-reaching, many individuals were unable to offer the financial support that had characterized the World War I era, so there was an increasing reliance on service organizations like the Salvation Army, as well as local, state, and federal governments. By 1930, one out of every four Montana households was receiving some kind of aid.

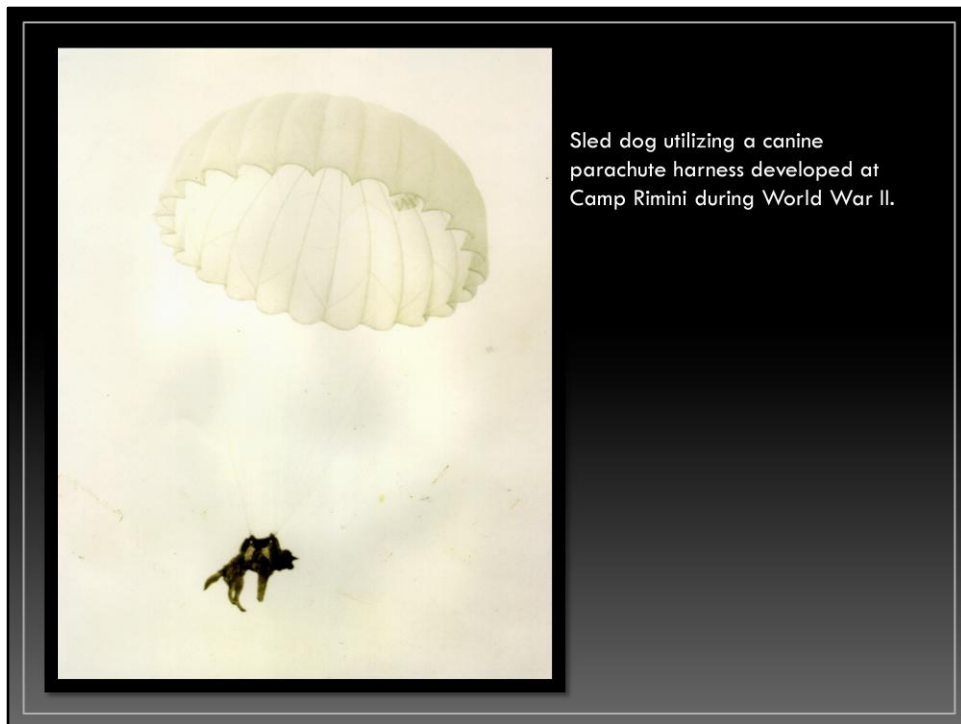
The CCC at work on the Savenac Nursery Improvement Program, Fort Missoula District, 1934.



One of the most far-reaching depression era programs was the Civilian Conservation Corp, or CCC, which, over a nine year period, employed 3 million young men. There were approximately one dozen CCC camps in Treasure State where workers accomplished numerous projects, such as the building of roads and recreational facilities, which required a ready pool of labor.



It is important to remember that not all who served were human. Before we had automobiles and good roads, animals played an essential role in the execution of many public service projects, and this is still true for much of the backcountry that remains inaccessible through other means.



Sled dog utilizing a canine parachute harness developed at Camp Rimini during World War II.

During World War II, sled dogs were trained at Camp Rimini west of Helena for use in arctic rescue missions.

Rebekahs Degree Staff, Helena Fortress No. 2, 1921



Before the 1970s, women's organizations played important, but often unacknowledged, roles as community builders. In addition to providing socially acceptable opportunities for women to be involved outside the home, these groups founded the social institutions, like libraries, museums, theaters, parks, and hospitals that we now consider essential aspects of community life.

First Convention of the Montana Federation of Negro Women's Clubs, Butte, 1921



In addition to providing service to the members of their own organizations, some women's groups focused their efforts on specific areas of need. For example, the Federation of Colored Women's Clubs provided a voice for Montana's African American community for more than fifty years.

First State Convention
of the Beta Sigma Phi
service sorority,
Helena, 1941

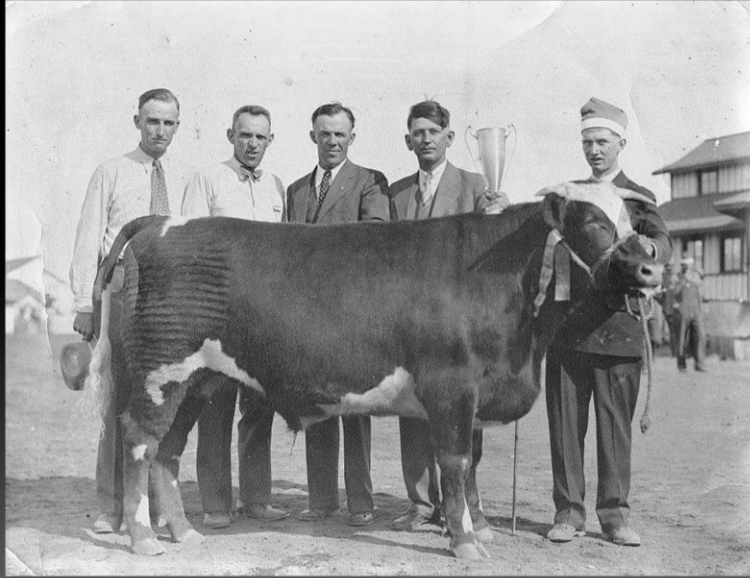


And groups like Beta Sigma Phi were primarily social organizations that incorporated community service into their other activities.



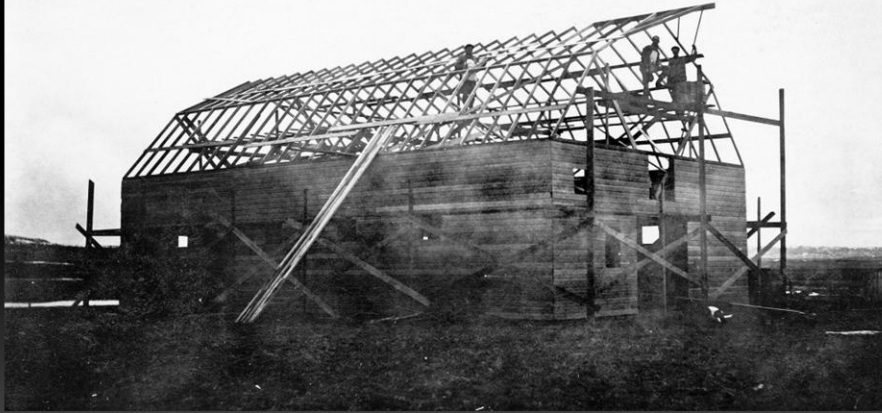
The first two decades of the 20th century saw the rise of a variety of organizations for young people like the Campfire girls...

Richard LaRock [right] and His 4-H Grand Champion Baby Beef, Montana State Fair, 1931



And 4-H and many others that were devoted to character development and the early training of America's youth so that they would grow up to be responsible citizens already well acquainted with the concepts of civic duty.

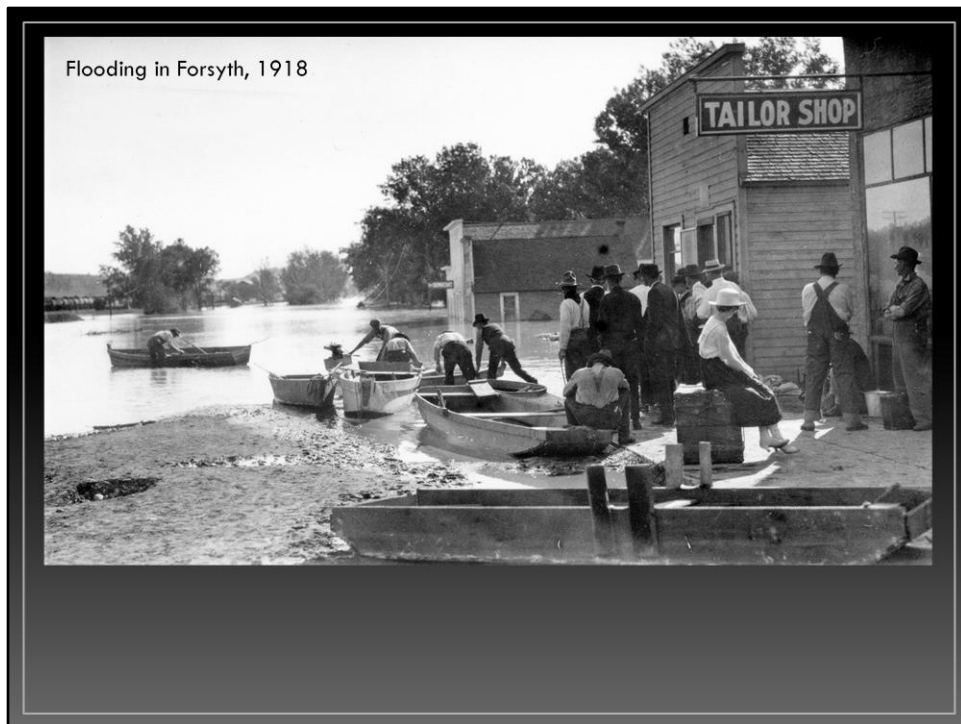
Construction of the Morrisette Barn, ca. 1912
Whittman Coulee Northwest of Hardin



Of course these youth organizations only built upon foundations laid at home, and more than anything else, the most common expression of community service in Montana has been the simple acts of kindness performed by neighbors helping neighbors, or as Sally Koch observed, the small opportunities that surround us every day. This is true whether it was helping your neighbor build a barn,



Or lending a hand in a tight spot.

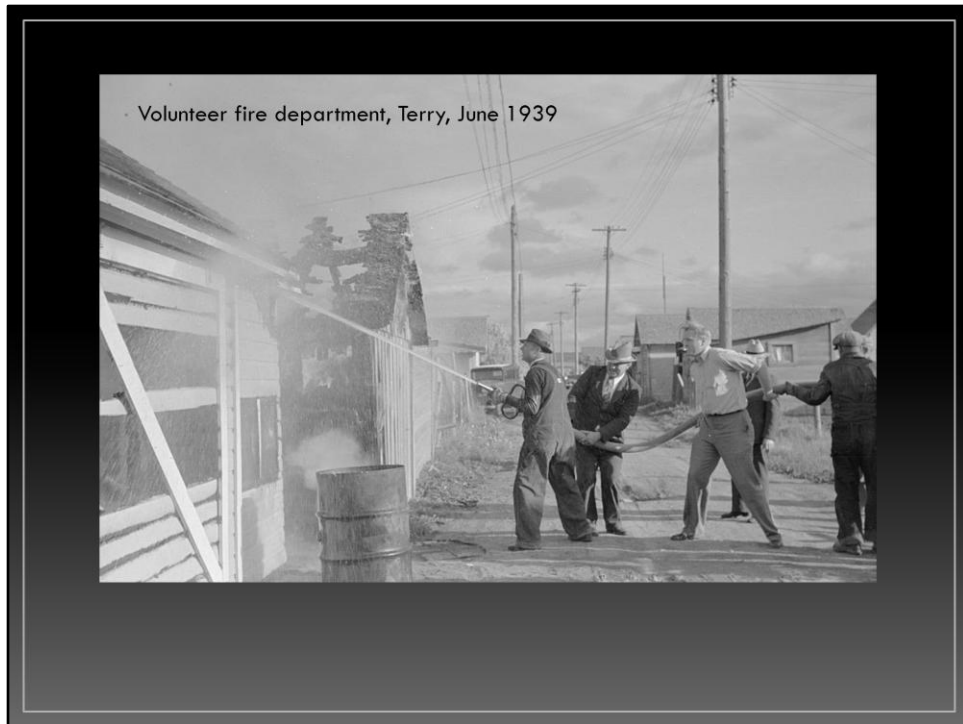


But the willingness to serve friends and neighbors is never more evident than it was in the face of disaster. Montanans have always met extraordinary needs in times of tragedy, whether it was flooding along the Yellowstone River,

Cleaning up after the Helena earthquake, 1935



The earthquakes that rocked Helena in 1935



Or the devastation wrought by fire.



Or the dangers of occupations like mining, illustrated here by rescue works who responded to an explosion at the Smith coal mine in Carbon County, which remains the worst coal mine disaster in Montana history. In summary, I'd like to quote President Clinton who noted that, "Citizen service is the very American idea that we meet our challenges not as isolated individuals but as members of a true community, with all of us working together... Though government has an important role to play in meeting the many challenges that remain before us, we are coming to understand that no organization, including government, will fully succeed without the active participation of each of us. Volunteers are vital to enabling this country to live up to the true promise of its heritage."

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Montana Historical Society (MHS), 2013

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Slide 2 – MHS PAC 94-59 folder 12/21

Slide 3 – Library of Congress, FSA-OWI

Slide 4 – MHS Museum

Slide 5 – MHS Museum

Slide 6 – MHS Museum

Slide 7 – Mother Mary of the Infant Jesus –

McNamara's Blog, Patheos.com; St. Ignatius

Mission – Travel Montana

Slide 8 – MHS PAC 947-401

Slide 9 – MHS Research Center

Slide 10 – From *Montana: Stories of the Land*,

Courtesy Dennis Gordon, Missoula

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by Charles I. Dean

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Slide 29 – Courtesy of Dr. William E.

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Slide 31 – "Helena as She Was,"

helenahistory.org

Slide 32 – Library of Congress, FSA-OWI

Slide 33 – From *Montana: Stories of the*

Land, Courtesy Flash Studios, Red Lodge